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The Camino de Santiago de Compostela (Spain) and The Via Francigena (Italy): a comparison between two important historic pilgrimage routes in Europe

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The Italian section of the Via Francigena, a Medieval pilgrimage route to Rome, has not yet been commercialised to its full potential when compared to the Camino de Santiago in Spain. There are many reasons for this under development. First, there is an absence of a specialised organisation focused on utilising the resources available; a difficulty that could be overcome by the forming a tourism body with the specific charter for developing these resources and attracting tourism. Second, the weight of the cultural heritage of Rome in the contest for religious tourism takes away from the valorisation of other pilgrimage routes of Italy. Nevertheless, since 2007 in the provinces of Parma, Massa Carrara, La Spezia and Lucca some effort, from both a religious and cultural perspective, has been made to advance tourism on the local leg of the route. By doing this, pilgrims and tourists have begun to walk along the ancient paths of faith towards Rome again.

This paper examines reasons for the differences in success and development, but also in management, between two of the most traditional historic pilgrimage routes in Europe. It seeks to understand why the Italian case study continues to show a weaker trajectory of improvement when compared to other traditional tourist attractions in Italy.

Key Words : Camino de Santiago, Via Francigena, cultural heritage, paths of faith, pilgrimage, regional tourism development.

Pilgrimage, The Most Ancient Type of Tourism

Technological innovations in transportation have given a boost to all types of modern tourism and among others to the most ancient of all, the pilgrimage. More economical and affordable fares have recently improved the flow toward old and new destinations. Pilgrimage sites such as Jerusalem or Rome have undergone a profound economic evolution which can be seen in the changes in town planning, in the enlargement of infrastructures (airports and railway stations), in the opening of accommodation facilities and in the transformation of local production systems.

However, in one particular case, in spite of the modern evolution of transportation, pilgrims choose to continue to travel on foot and each moment of each phase of the journey which may be a slow walk of days or even weeks toward the place of worship is essential. In fact, long pilgrimages on foot still retain many of the original attributes that made them famous among Christians in the second half of the Middle Ages. Among them, the Camino of Santiago de Compostela has handed down many of its traditions over the years, such as the use of cloaks, typical walking sticks and the characteristic shell. Still today, even in this century

of instant travel, thousands of pilgrims enthusiastically choose to give up means of transport and to walk painstakingly along the Spanish paths of faith. After the Second World War pilgrims from all Europe - and even from other continents - began to walk toward destinations of faith thus contributing to create a remarkable cultural identity (Archibispado de Santiago de Compostela, interview 2013); a kind of tourism different to others which are nourished by the consumerism of contemporary society.

In religious tourism, the spiritual experience along the way is often the purpose of the journey, so it can be said that the touristic region concerned does not focus only on the final destination and its surrounding area, but primarily on the road itself and the places along it where the pilgrims can stop for a rest and visit a shrine or cultural heritage spot (Corvo, 2011:17).

The definition of a touristic region should be recalled - a territory where natural or anthropic peculiarities attract flows of tourists and activate more services than necessary for the local population (Innocenti, 2007:130; Cavallaro and Pipino, 1991:64). A region should promote all its peculiarities because all tourists irrespective of where they are from or their social class are motivated in similar ways.

Among the purposes of this paper, we broach the concept of ‘the linear development of a tourist region’, including the road itself, the areas nearby and all the places along the way, where the pilgrim can stop and rest (Lucarno, 2002). On a long pilgrimage on foot, the final destination benefits financially from only a small part of what is spent by the pilgrim / tourist. Most of what is spent on the route is distributed uniformly in the different places visited on the journey. Small rural villages, as well as big towns along the way, can receive limited but constant benefits in addition to traditional income.

Pilgrimages on foot take their time, if the route is hundreds of kilometres long, sometime up to weeks. So generally speaking they take / stay longer than most other types of tourism.

Some Theoretical Aspects of The Modern Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism Destinations

Pilgrimage can be defined as ‘a physical journey in search of truth, in search of what is sacred or holy’ (Vukonić, 1996: 80). This search moves people to travel toward sites, detaching themselves from everyday life by the experience of holiness. In spite of the trend of decreasing social and cultural importance of western Christianity, religious tourism grew exceptionally during the second half of 20th century, while in the meantime church attendance showed a continuous decline. The rediscovery of the values of a pilgrimage is due to many factors: the ‘privatisation of religion’; the ‘search for roots’ and for answers to important existential questions, such as to find answers to our questions about faith and the supernatural; the rediscovery of traditional Christian spirituality and finally; the technological improvement of transportation infrastructures. Moreover, many people visit shrines to fulfil their educational interests in local culture and history; the religious ceremonies performed in holy places (processions, holy masses, penitential rites), represent an experience of moral revival for the visitors’ religious traditions and faith (Olsen, Timothy, 2006:3-5).

Even if technology has changed our common view of life, time spent in sacred places still preserves an extraordinary value, a pilgrim searches for places to meditate or monks to pray or speak with, in order to explore the difficulties in his / her life.

Are there any other common characteristics shared by medieval penitents and today’s pilgrims? Once the

pilgrimage was a way of life chosen after an individual and spiritual decision, sometimes after a conversion or a strong profession of faith. But modern pilgrims cannot avoid the socio-economic rules of contemporary society and of consumer tourism, so besides soul-searching, today’s pilgrims still look for quiet, sometimes frugal but comfortable conditions of travel, and are sometimes in search of a more gratifying religious life, tending to serve their neighbour. Many of them are motivated only by cultural interests.^[1]

For these reasons it is not only the most famous traditional places of faith that are important destinations for religious tourism, but also less important religious destinations still preserve the strength of their ancient traditions. In these places one can find the roots of Christian faith, one can pray, feel a sense of belonging both to the place and to the ideal thread which still links pilgrimages of different times.

Moreover, many places of faith are rich in history and cultural heritage. The ties between religious and cultural tourism are strong and enhance each other. Pilgrimages increase the value of artistic heritage and ancient monuments, giving added value to tourism. Art, faith and devotion depend on the same environment and the same emotional landscape. As local history unifies artistic expressions and faith, devotion and art remain two close aspects of the same form of tourism (Massone, 2002).

Shrines are found all over the world. At the end of 20th century more than six thousand places of pilgrimage were listed in Western Europe though some of these are not approved by the Christian Churches and are folk shrines where pilgrimage is encouraged by local priests. Some however, such as Lourdes, Fatima, San Giovanni Rotondo are world famous (Nolan and Nolan, 1989:5). Italy is the country with the highest number of shrines and some of these have become so famous and visited they have changed the local landscape and economy radically. Thanks to tourism

1. The most reliable source of pilgrims’ reasons and characters with regard to the Camino de Santiago - as a remarkable example of modern pilgrimage - is the census conducted by the Archdiocese of Santiago de Compostela who register almost all pilgrims on their arrival at the final destination of the pilgrimage (Archidiocesis de Santiago, Datos estadísticos de la peregrinación, www.archicompostela.org/peregrino/Estadisticas/Estadisticaperegrinacion.htm, 2015) (see also Lopez, 2013).

and the revenue brought in by thousands of pilgrims coming to worship the saints and their relics, small villages have been turned into wealthy communities (Eade and Sallnow, 1991).

But, religious tourism not only brings economic development (consequences of tourist activities) and preservation of heritage in order to satisfy tourists' expectations: the consequences of tourist influx can also lead to environmental degradation, monumental wear, a mixing up of spiritual and profane goals and the disengagement of the devotee, leading to a fall in popularity of the areas of the 'linear touristic region'. The concentration of many visitors (pilgrims, cultural and religious tourists) into a limited area on the occasion of particular religious events can cause a secularisation of the phenomenon, a weakening of beliefs in the sacred and divine and a general limitation of the social role of religious institutions (Olsen, Timothy, 2006:12-13). During a pilgrimage, worshipping is not limited to a short stay at the final destination, but is extended to the whole length of the route. As testified by some pilgrims, alone and often lost in prayer and meditation, the journey itself is more important than the holy place of devoutness. This particular aspect of pilgrimage is evidenced in the last case study which will be dealt with in the second part of this paper.

The Pilgrimage to Santiago De Compostela

Among the classical Christian places of devotion, in the last four decades Apostle James's sepulchre at Santiago de Compostela has been visited by an increasing number of faithful: they reach the Galician town by walking along the historic roads of the Middle Ages. The pilgrimage to Santiago is not a one or two day stay in the town in order to worship the holy relicts, it is, first and foremost, a long journey through many regions in northern Spain.

We know that James the Apostle preached in Galicia before his martyrdom in Jerusalem in 44AD. According to the legend, his mortal remains were buried in Galicia, where they were neglected until the 9th century, when a supernatural event caused their discovery again. In that period the tradition of pilgrimages began to lead millions of the faithful from all over Christian Europe to the sepulchre. This tradition had a new boost after pope Callist II established the Jacobean holy year, when all the pilgrims arriving in Santiago would receive a special 'jubilee indulgence'.

So, besides the basilicas built by King Alfonso II in 834 and King Alfonso III in 899, a new cathedral was added according to the plans of bishop Diego Gelmirez in 1112. The three churches became prominent not only in Spain, but across Europe, and became the meeting point of many pilgrimage routes: the busiest of them was named 'Camino de Santiago' (Onorato, 2011:129-130).

The classic medieval pathways were a range of roads converging in the northern Iberian peninsula from many parts of Europe: from Seville and Andalusia (along the *Via de la Plata*), from Coimbra and eastward, from the Roncisvalle pass and Somport pass in the Pyrenees. The two Pyrenean roads met at Puente la Reina, in Navarra, from where the pilgrims set off straight to Galicia along an inland path parallel to the Cantabric coast. At Jaca, near Puente la Reina, the main road received the pilgrim flow from Barcelona and the Mediterranean regions. Many English people came by ship too, landing on the Cantabric or Galician coasts, closer to the final destination. In France the four main roads converging in the Pyrenees were named after the most important towns they went through: Toulouse, Tours, Limoges and Le Puy. Further eastward the grid of roads reached the most distant places of Christian Europe in Germany, Poland, the Baltic regions, Austria, Italy and the Balkans.

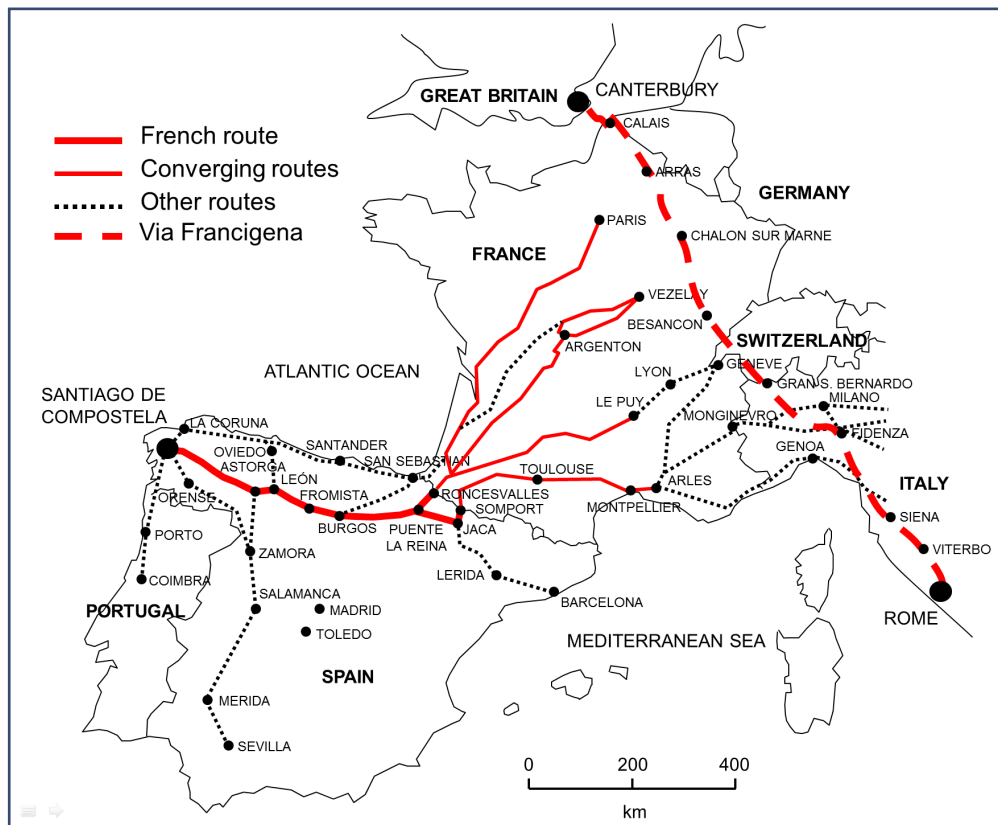
Today, the pilgrims who want to visit St. James's sepulchre walk along one of these traditional routes and go through the same intermediate devotional places where, centuries ago, many spiritual and logistic buildings (churches, hospitals, guest quarters in monasteries) were erected along the way.

Here we are not going to deal with the reasons for the centuries of decline of Camino de Santiago, a consequence of the political and historical evolution of the Iberian region since the end of Middle Ages. After the end of Franco's dictatorship period, more and more people rediscovered this pilgrimage as cultural and spiritual heritage (see Figure 1).

The Via Francigena

Along with Santiago de Compostela and Jerusalem, Rome is one of the three great destinations for devout Christians and has inspired long pilgrimages from all over Western Europe since the Middle Ages. Among these routes, one of the most famous is the Via Francigena, so called because of its starting point in France. The Via Francigena enters Italy from the Cottian Alps and heads towards Rome through the Po

Figure 1 : Map of the Camino de Santiago and Via Francigena.



Valley, the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines and the hilly territory of Tuscany and northern Lazio. Among the many European pilgrimage routes, this route, now officially recognised as the Via Francigena, is the 1,600 km trail described by the Archbishop of Canterbury Sigeric during his return to Canterbury from Rome, where he had gone in 990 to receive the pallium from the Pope. Sigeric completed his journey in 79 daily stages, passing through Siena and Lucca, crossing the Passo della Cisa, coming down the Taro Valley to Fidenza and then crossing the Po river near Piacenza. After reaching Pavia and Vercelli he travelled upstream along the Dora Baltea River ending in Aosta and from here climbed over the Great Saint Bernard Pass, down through the Valais and across France to Calais (Bruschi, 2011:44). The central Italian section of the route has Longobard^[2] origins: Paolo Diacono, in his *Historia Langobardorum*, tells the story of how, when they reached their possessions in Tuscany, the Longobards passed through the *Alpem Bardonis* (Mount Bardone road), and came through the present day Passo della Cisa (Club Alpino Italiano - Section of Parma, 2006) (see Figure 2).

2. The Longobards were a Germanic people who ruled large parts of the Italian Peninsula from 568 to 774.

Like the great pilgrimage routes of the Middle Ages, the Via Francigena of modern times has gone through a long period of decay and neglect, and it is only in recent decades that its historic, cultural and religious importance has been re-acknowledged. In Italy the Via Francigena was promoted on the occasion of the Jubilee in 2000 which prompted sponsorship of this historical route; other plans to restore its religious heritage have been realised after local proposals, but without any coordinated strategy among the places and authorities along the route (Bruschi, 2011:47-48).

A Comparison With The Camino De Santiago

In contrast to the Camino de Santiago, the Via Francigena, in Italy as well as abroad, is not utilised by a large number of walkers and pilgrims for religious, cultural or sporting motivations. Although it received recognition as a Cultural Route by the Council of Europe in 1994, its touristic value is still underestimated. There are several reasons why Italy has been unable to utilise this resource in the way that Northern Spain has with the Camino de Santiago (AEVF, Associazione Europea Vie Francigene - Vie Francigene European Association, interview, march 2016). Italy's Via Francigena still does not attract

Figure 2 : The Italian section of Sigeric's Via Francigena.

significant tourism and does not generate very many relevant business opportunities, because of the lack of infrastructure specifically created in order to host pilgrims. It must be noted that for almost all the points of strength that are observable in the promotion of the Camino de Santiago there are as many weaknesses for the Via Francigena (Lucarno, 2011:155-179).

Firstly, the tradition of pilgrimage on Via Francigena has not been continuous, because, after the Middle Ages, and particularly after the Reformation, which took most States of Middle Europe and their population away from the Pope's religious authority, the flow of pilgrims decreased to almost nothing, except during the year of jubilees (AA.VV. 2016, *passim*). It therefore needs to be rebuilt and promoted, but the outcome of this investment is uncertain.

There is not only one Via Francigena but a number of possible routes that have changed over the centuries and among these is the official route corresponding to Sigeric's itinerary (Bruschi, 2011:43-46). This creates misunderstanding and different versions of the original route do not help to encourage potential tourists. In addition, there is no single authority for the promotion of the Via Francigena throughout Italy. In some cases the initiative by different public and private

organisations with the objective of obtaining the required funding was taken but these organisations were uncoordinated and focused on short stretches of the road that were unconnected, so the results were not what could have been achieved for the whole route if personnel and a coordinated network had been involved. As a consequence, there is a lack of information, sign-posting and awareness on the entire route.

If promotional material (travel guides, brochures) exists at all it is limited and in short-supply. The cultural preparation of the promotional teams in local tourist offices is not yet sufficient to provide adequate information on the Via Francigena's historic, artistic and spiritual value because of their lack of experience in this new kind of tourism.

National or international organisations promoting pilgrimages to the route are not widespread, and services to provide hospitality and spiritual support are lacking at a local level. A policy of price control to favour non consumer tourism (e.g. special rates for pilgrims at hostels and restaurants) is also absent.

Christian devotion in the Italian population, which should at least initially be the core business of the

pilgrimage, is lower than that of the Spaniards^[3] and the rediscovery of traditional Christian values in Italy has been less than that experienced in other parts of Europe. The related lack of preponderant spiritual motivation in Italian pilgrims makes it difficult to propose to tourist operators and other local businesses a policy of preferential prices for the use of guest quarters by pilgrims, as they do along the Camino de Santiago.

The restoration of historical buildings to fulfil the traditional function of sheltering pilgrims is just beginning: in particular, operators are not willing to restore the old guest houses for accommodation for modern pilgrims due to the lack of economic return, at least in the short term. Therefore, the route lacks operators who will assist pilgrims by providing travel assistance and facilities with lower accommodation rates and encouraging acceptance by the population. The spiritual and material assistance of Church authorities, to facilitate the establishment of accreditation, to promote accommodation at special prices, to grant a certification and to assist pilgrims with dedicated masses etc. is still lacking. On the contrary, at Santiago a Certificate of Completion (the *Compostela*) is provided by the Archbishop of Santiago to all of those who have reached their goal. They obtain evidence of this by getting stamps on a 'running sheet' as they pass through the various cities and towns to show that they have walked or bicycled at least part of the way.

There are no dedicated and properly equipped pedestrian or bike paths for the pilgrims and the original medieval paths are largely lost. Occasionally there is a local network of paths, which are not always adequate. In some sections of the Via, one is forced to walk on roads, side by side with motor vehicles. The lack of dedicated paths prevents the pilgrim from distinguishing the real and substantial identity of the Via Francigena, engulfed, such as it is by motor traffic.

There are many different versions of the Francigena logo, the signs are not consistently placed and do not have explanatory panels to give information on the distances or details of local attractions or diversions

3. The motivation for the Santiago pilgrimage, of which almost half of its pilgrims are Spanish, is religious (Oficina del Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela, 2015). In September 2015 the Italian Touring Club (TCI) held an online survey of about 400 Italian and foreign tourists who had walked the Via Francigena over the last few years, 91.5% were Italians. Results showed that only 14% of those interviewed gave religious or spiritual reasons as their motivation.

and this lack of information and facilities fails to capitalise on the opportunity of giving pilgrims the sense of a shared experience with the others travelling along the Via (AEVF, Associazione Europea Vie Francigene - Vie Francigene European Association, interview, March 2016). This all gives the traveller a feeling that they are not being assisted by the authorities and higher organisations.

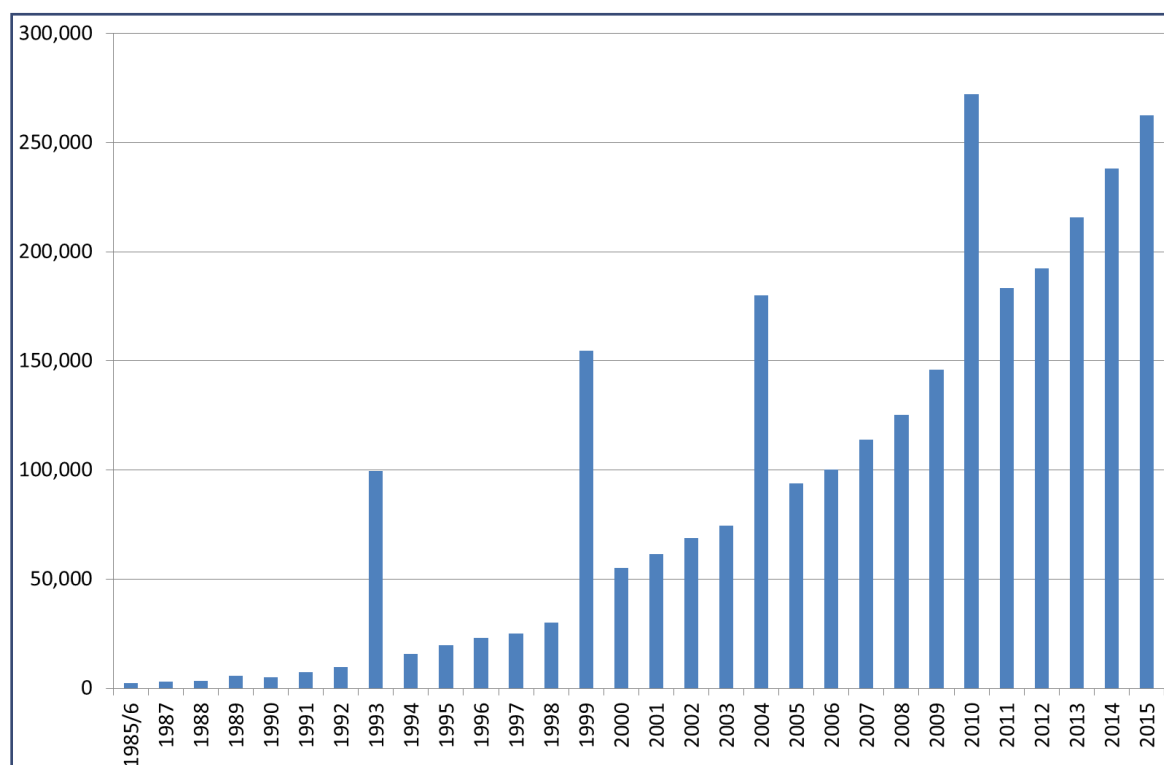
There are no widely distributed works of literature or film that promote knowledge of the Via like the Camino - the Buñuel film *The Milky Way* (1969), the recent novel *Il Cammino di Santiago* by Paulo Coelho (Milan, Bompiani, 2001) or the American film *The Way* by Estevez starring his father Martin Sheen. These add a certain literary or cultural significance to the Camino, which is missing for the Via Francigena.

However, the Via Francigena has some strengths, particularly in the widespread presence of a cultural heritage rich in high artistic values and architectural styles with diverse constructions from very different epochs along the route which could attract interest alongside the spiritual attractions. In fact, cultural heritage attracts pilgrims, and the pilgrim may give new lifeblood to monuments (and indirectly to services located around them) that otherwise, especially if they are located in marginal areas, would be ignored by mass tourism.

Some sections of the Via, and in particular those in the mountain territories, offer a particularly picturesque landscape. So, the material wealth of cultural heritage and the intangible items (represented by the tradition of pilgrimage) could mutually assist each other by increasing tourist numbers; pilgrims are also interested in visiting places of cultural interest along the way and these places would not have as many visitors if pilgrims were not passing through.

The Pilgrim's Profile

Plog rated tourists' personality and classified them as psychocentrics, anxious subjects shunning any adventurous experiences, and allocentrics, more adventurous and bold, who reflect personality in their touristic choices. Between these two extreme stereotypes there are many intermediate psychological approaches that Plog described as distributed along a Gaussian curve, with a maximum corresponding to the intermediate personality (Plog, 1973; Innocenti, 2007). The modern pilgrimage on foot is, above all, a kind of tourism involving allocentric subjects because of the high level of adaptation required by the traveling and

Figure 3 : Number of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago from 1985 to 2015.

sheltering conditions - so different from the standards of other tourism experiences. Pilgrims must be bold and accept the general hardships and risks of the journey. Luckily nowadays they do not run the risk of meeting bandits as they did in medieval times. In reality, however, this kind of experience involves only a few potential pilgrims because the majority would not be able to bear such difficult conditions of travel.

At present we do not have any complete statistics concerning the Italian road because no investigation has been carried out thus far, but we do have facts about the Camino de Santiago, provided by the Archiepiscopate of Santiago. The pilgrim's prevalent age is middle-age: 55% of them are between 30 and 60, about 17% are older than 60 and 28% are younger than 30. About half of them (47%) are women. They go on foot, but about 10% go by bicycle; very few (0.3%) ride on horseback (Archidiocesis de Santiago, 2015).

The time of choice is summer, mostly August and July, when the road and its final destination are crowded. The religious stimulus is predominant, but a quarter of tourists travel for cultural interests.

Pilgrims belong to all professions, but most of them are employees, students, technicians, and practitioners. Their education is generally high.

A Case Study in Italy: The Via Francigena in The Province of Parma

With over 262,000 pilgrims registered by the Archidiocesis of Santiago in 2015, the Camino de Santiago has now consolidated a growth trend which, after about three decades since statistics began, confirms that the great development of interest is not in an occasional or transitional phase, but likely to last for several years (Figure 3). The Via Francigena, by contrast, has no reliable official data on the people who actually complete the path to Rome. There are only partial appraisals from the *Association of Municipalities of the Via Francigena*,^[4] which has for a few years monitored the requests of prospective pilgrims for credentials without having any way to confirm their actual arrival in Rome or the actual extent of their journey. Also the period of data collection is not uniform: the last one was in 2008 when, between 6 March and 20 October, 707 credentials were requested (useful for accessing accommodation structures of religious congregations). 20.7% of requests were from foreigners. Most were requested in the northern Italian provinces of Venice (141) and Milan (80), then Udine and other provinces (23); the southern regions are virtually absent. Among the foreigners, most are Germans (58) followed by

French (26) and then Swiss and British (24). 62.8% of the pilgrims were male. The figures are still so small that they cannot be relied on for significant data elaborations and also because personal data and geographic origin have not been provided by all. The credentials issued in 2008 had however increased compared to those of 2007 (292) and 2006 (512). In the first six months of 2015 the *Association* issued about 2,100 credentials.

The quantity of pilgrims on the Italian section of the Via Francigena continues to be unknown particularly in relation to how many days they are on the road. For this reason from the statistical data it is impossible to assess whether people are travelling for cultural or spiritual reasons^[5] and what the actual impact of pilgrim tourism on the economy of the surrounding areas is. Despite the promotion carried out on the occasion of the Jubilee in 2000, the Via Francigena has not yet taken off as a tourist attraction. It remains an unattractive proposition which does not spark large interest, in spite of its demanding and interesting intrinsic qualities which offer a very positive and emotional experience.

Among the sporadic and non-continuous development of tourism initiatives, it is worth mentioning a proposal made in 2007 by the Association of Tourism in the Province of Parma, in conjunction with the *Parma Tourism Agency*. The agency is a limited liability company formed by public shareholders (from Provinces, Chambers of Commerce, Mountain Communities, Municipalities) and private members with the objectives of promoting tourism in the Province of Parma and of establishing tourist products that are then marketed by tour operators. In Italy a

package called 'CamminaCammina' (*Walk, Walk*) was put on offer to encourage the rediscovery of the stretch of the Apennine walk of the Via Francigena between Fidenza and Lucca: a 208 km long path, easy to walk in 10 days. The third edition of this package was published in 2009. It included 4 dates of departure (in April, May, August and September).^[6] The package cost 539 euros and included a tourist guide, 9 nights accommodation with breakfast, guided visits to the main monuments, entertainment by local authorities and transport of luggage. Participants received a road book with detailed tour information on places to visit and on the difficulties of the walk along asphalt and dirt roads, rough mule tracks and footpaths.^[7]

The proposed itinerary was not meant to exactly follow the route of Sigerico but tried to cover paths as much as possible (around 50% of the route), visiting villages and buildings of historic or architectural interest, churches or monasteries, castles, bridges, historical or archaeological areas, sites of natural interest and museums. It stopped at hostels and guest houses in monasteries which provided the accommodation. Significant collaboration was offered by religious communities, such as the Convent of Pontremoli which opened its doors and offered hospitality to all visitors, regardless of creed and reasons for travel.

About 100 people participated in 2007 and that number increased to about 300 in 2008. In 2009, about 350 participants from Lombardy, Lazio, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont, Liguria, Sardinia and England registered (Department of Tourism of the Province of Parma, 2009). Not all of the participants walked the entire stretch proposed by the package and the data do not take into account the number of nights stayed. The total cost being approximately 90 euros per day per person including the daily sum of the package plus 30

4. The *Association of Municipalities of the Via Francigena* set up on April 7th 2001 became the *European Association of the Vie Francigene* in 2006; its headquarters is in Fidenza, it has 60 members between the municipalities, provinces and regions and has the aim of promoting tourism along the Via Francigena. Among its objectives are to determine a uniform definition of what constitutes the Via Francigena which can be recognised and codified; the enhancement of the environment which it passes through; the understanding of the relationship between all the cultural elements along the way; the consolidation of relations with the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and the Institute of European Cultural Itineraries. It also aims to obtain the recognition of its privileged promotional role for the Via Francigena, to extend the partnership to the greatest number of local authorities and to initiate interventions in utilizing and recovering cultural heritage (Bruschi, 2011). The *Association* at the moment is managed as a Commission and is coordinated and financed with funds provided at a ministerial level.

5. About 40% of the pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago are partaking for purely spiritual reasons and 95% for spiritual and cultural ones (Arzobispado Santiago de Compostela, 2013).

6. Technical organisation is entrusted to a travel agent in Salsomaggiore Terme. It is a cooperative initiative with the municipalities that surround the path, the Provinces of Parma, Massa-Carrara, La Spezia, Lucca, the *European Association of the Via Francigena*, the regions of Emilia-Romagna, Liguria and Tuscany, as well as other territorial authorities and private companies.

7. Parma Turismi, *Da Fidenza a Lucca lungo la Via Francigena*, Parma, Parma Turismi, 2007. It also refers to the scale 1:25.000 tourist map *La Via Francigena da Collecchio al Passo della Cisa*, published in 2006 by CAI (Italian Alpine Club), Section of Parma, which represents the variant of the route from Parma instead of Fidenza.

to 40 euros per day for extra expenses, especially for the purchase of typical local products. The average tourist was around 40 years of age, educated, and motivated predominantly by cultural reasons. None of the participants in the package reached Rome, but although religious reasons for travelling were not predominant, all of them appreciated the moments of spirituality offered by the religious communities that welcomed the groups (Parma Tourism Agency, 2009). It must be taken into account that there were still some logistical problems due to the different capacity of guest houses and hostels attached to religious buildings, some of which are unable to accept groups of more than 10 people, and also due to the variability of the time and terms of access to monuments and buildings.

Prospects of Economic Development for a Path of Faith

The data about the Camino shown in previous paragraphs and the growth in religious tourism allows us to forecast a period of development and interesting new business opportunities for people living in marginal territories, and last but not least, the possibility for the restoration of many historic buildings, most of which seem doomed to abandonment. Today the pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago is not only a circumstance of faith, but also a social and touristic event that can involve a multitude of people and international tour-operators. According to the development model for a tourist region (Butler, 1980), pilgrimage tourism is still in its early phases and investment will produce profits for many years to come.

Can this success be reproduced along other routes leading to holy places of Christian tradition such as Jerusalem or Rome? Today, Jerusalem is paying a price for political instability in the Middle East and the fact that some routes travel through predominantly Islamic regions. However, Rome has at least two roads of faith (the Via Romea, on the eastern side of Italian peninsula, and the Via Francigena) which could be exploited by the rediscovery of both religious and cultural tourism. Indeed, some of the strengths of the Camino de Santiago can also be found in the Italian territorial and socio-cultural context.

The factors involved in the recent success of the pilgrimage walk of the Camino de Santiago are many. Firstly the pilgrimage is not linked to miraculous events and it is true that very few pilgrims go to

Santiago to invoke a miracle, but they go to 'meet' the Apostle James - or, better, to find an answer to their existential questions - which is the reason for their own personal path of faith. This applies both to Catholics and also to believers in other religions (Onorato, 2011). Throughout the route, their goal appears within their reach and the achievement is made tangible little by little, day by day and step by step. The great majority of pilgrims are reportedly satisfied with this experience, with its limited impact on consumerism and its inexpensive cost and transportation prices - compared to trips to other devotional destinations (Interview at Oficina del Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela, August, 2013).

Interest in the Via Francigena by government organisations is fairly recent and local tourist organisations and stakeholders have only just begun to consider this itinerary as an opportunity for economic growth. The creation of the *Via Francigena Municipalities Association* is the first step towards giving shape to these proposals and to the planning of an adequate infrastructure with the necessary facilities to satisfy the diverse touristic needs of pilgrims according to European standards.

A recent convention with the participation of the Italian Ministry for Tourism and Cultural Heritage held in April 2016 at the Association headquarters in Fidenza took into consideration the situation in Italy compared to other European cultural routes and proposed guidelines for the activation of cultural and business ventures so as to guarantee the Via Francigena an increased number of tourists in the future. The Ministry was asked, in particular, to make an effort to communicate the Via Francigena brand, to promote recuperation and renovation of unused buildings such as hostels to host pilgrims, to promote a better knowledge of the characteristics of the pilgrimage through surveys, to increase the sales of typical local products and to promote complementary touristic facilities such as spas, and centres dedicated to wellness and free time (AEVF, Associazione Europea Vie Francigene - Vie Francigene European Association, meeting in Piacenza, 29 April 2016).

The Camino de Santiago shows so many more points of strength that contrast sharply with the weaknesses of the Via Francigena. However, along the Via Francigena there is an abundance of cultural and architectural wonders which represent an extraordinary value for those who are sensitive to the history and art. The restoration to their original function (of the guesthouses, hostels and small chapels), which is still

sporadic and slow due to the absence of volunteers and tourists, would strengthen the ideological and spiritual links between the modern pilgrim and all the generations who shared the experience in the past.

The restoration of the Via Francigena requires substantial financial investment and interregional coordination which would lead to the following positive socio-economic and environmental impact:

- new business opportunities for traditional economic activities especially in rural and mountain areas with reception and accommodation activities;
- an increase in working capital not only at the destination of the pilgrimage but spread along the whole route;
- architectural recovery of historical buildings of cultural interest, otherwise abandoned;
- modernisation of infrastructure and the creation of new trails accessible to other forms of slow tourism;
- increase in investment.

Conclusion

The Via Francigena along the Apennines to Parma is just a small part of a bigger project. The few pilgrims that go on to Rome from the Great Saint Bernard Pass, if not even from Canterbury, have not been counted and, in any event, they do not use the services offered by the initiative 'CamminaCammina'.

The actual pilgrimage as it was 10 centuries ago, involving confirmation of faith through meditation and prayer, is less common these days. Its future success as a tourist phenomenon depends on the relationship between the two kinds of cultural heritage present: the first tangible (the historic buildings and the works of art that they contain), the other intangible (the long tradition of pilgrimage which is not easy to reproduce and is unique as an experience of sharing both spiritually and physically), which, like an invisible thread link the pilgrim of today to generations of faithful from centuries ago. These two kinds of cultural heritage are currently under-utilised.

In these circumstances it can reasonably be assumed that the future development of religious tourism on the Via Francigena will continue to have a more distinctly cultural character and will more likely be appreciated by an older participant compared to those who walk the Camino de Santiago. It will not reach popularity until it is recognised as a pilgrimage across many countries, from Canterbury to Rome, but if this happens it may

eventually attract a large percentage of cyclists alongside the traditional walking pilgrims and also people travelling by bus or train for some parts of the route.

In short, the pilgrimage along the Via Francigena is an undertaking that is taking its initial steps towards a fragile and uncertain phase of exploration. This 'journey' can only be organised in Italy with the coordination of the several proposed initiatives and then it could be successfully extended to the other countries covered by the Via Francigena, to create a European network of medieval pilgrimage.

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